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SUBJECT: SERBIAN AMBASSADOR: ITALIAN MESSAGES ON KOSOVO
STATUS TALKS "BALANCED"

REF: ROME 137

1. (SBU) Summary. Serbia and Montenegro Ambassador Darko Uskokovic told Poloff that the GOI has given a balanced message to Belgrade and Pristina as the Kosovo status talks prepare to get underway. He noted that the Italian MFA has urged both sides to remain open as during the negotiations and to focus on standards in Kosovo. Representatives of the MFA told him that the GOI and EU prefer a negotiated solution, ideally by the end of 2006. Uskokovic is surprised that the looming Kosovo status talks have pushed the Montenegrin independence referendum off the radar screen for the GOI. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Uskokovic met with poloff on February 3 to discuss the results of the recent Contact Group meeting in London. Uskokovic had recently met with Raimondo De Cardona of the Italian MFA to get a readout of the meetings. De Cardona presented Uskokovic with a statement of conclusions and told him that the GOI position was identical to that of the other CG members: the need to begin status talks immediately, to remain open to the range of outcomes, and preference for a negotiated solution in the course of 2006. De Cardona told Uskokovic that the CG was focused on standards, institutional development in Kosovo and the need for the Serb community in Kosovo to participate in the talks.

3. (SBU) Uskokovic stated that the GOI message was extremely balanced from the SaM point of view, since there has been nothing said that could give the Kosovar Albanian side the impression that Italy believes that Kosovar independence is a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, Uskokovic believed that the talks will result in a phased independence for Kosovo.

4. (SBU) According to Uskokovic, De Cardona said that Italy would be watching events in Montenegro "very closely". Despite that, Uskokovic came away from the meeting with the impression that the GOI is not seized with the possibility (inevitability - in Uskokovic's opinion) of an April 2006 referendum for Montenegrin independence. Uskokovic raised (cautiously) a request from Montenegrin PM Filip Vujanovic to visit Italy in early 2006. De Cardona stated that a Vujanovic visit would be acceptable, but did not commit to giving any dates for a potential visit.

5. (SBU) Comment: While it is true that the GOI is placing more emphasis on the Kosovo issue, the Montenegrin issue is still receiving attention in Rome. The GOI is coordinating its approach to Montenegro through EU Envoy Lajcak. The GOI has been consistent in delivering only those points which have been agreed upon by the Contact Group and is most likely the reason De Cardona gave no comments on the Montenegrin issue. The GOI remains committed to CG unity in dealing with both Belgrade, Podgorica and Pristina.
SPOGLI